

Vidyāpati Thākur.—By NAGENDRA NATH GUPTA.

[Read 7th December, 1904.]

Twenty-two years ago Dr. G. A. Grierson edited a collection of *Vidyāpati's* poems. These appeared as an extra Number, Part I, for 1882, of the *Journal* of this Society. Since then a great many more facts relating to this famous Maithil poet have come to light. Dr. Grierson's collection contained in all 82 poems, and he believed these were very nearly all that are known in Tirhut. This is not to be wondered at, since the collection was mostly made from the mouth of singers. Besides these, however, a great number of poems and songs, some of great poetic power and beauty, are to be found in Mithilā in old palm-leaf and other manuscripts, scattered about in different households and villages. People are unwilling to part with these valuable manuscripts, and it requires a great deal of time, patience and labour to collect these poems and transcribe them from the old manuscripts. There is one palm-leaf manuscript, said to be in the handwriting of *Vidyāpati's* great grandson and believed to be genuine, containing no less than 400 poems. Most of these have been copied out and are at present in my possession.¹ They have been closely examined by the best Paṇḍits and scholars of Mithilā and have been pronounced to be genuine. The internal evidence as regards poetic merit, form of language and verse and the unmistakeable individuality of *Vidyāpati*, is also complete.

Most of *Vidyāpati's* poems current in Bengal were pronounced to be spurious by Dr. Grierson. This is so far true that the language, rhythm and even the sense of the Maithil poet have been frightfully corrupted in Bengal, but the intrinsic poetic value is undeniable. It now transpires that most of these poems may be found in Mithilā in old manuscripts, and it will not be difficult to restore them to their original shape and meaning. Besides writing under his own name *Vidyāpati* wrote under several literary titles, and sufficient evidence is forthcoming to establish this fact satisfactorily. Up to now the titles that have been ascertained to be his are :—कविशेखर, कवि कण्ठहार, सिद्ध भूपति, नव जयदेव, दशवधान. In the Bengal collection the title

¹ Since reading this paper I have obtained possession of the original palm-leaf manuscript. The number of poems is about 350.—*Author*.

of कविरञ्जन is also found, which is the same as कविरतन in the Maithil poems. The title of कविकण्ठहार is to be met with in Dr. Grierson's collection. There is a large number of poems bearing the title of कविशेखर. The title of सिंह भूपति does not belong to Vidyāpati himself but to Raja S'iva Simh, or some other member of the family. Some poems have been composed under the name of सिंह भूपति. In the भणित्ता of one poem of this class the word राजपण्डित also occurs :—

वहरिष्यो एक अपराध खेमिय

राजपण्डित भान ।

रमनि राधा रसिक यदुपति

सिंह भूपति जान ॥

“Even an enemy forgives one (*viz.*, the first) offence, saith Rāj Paṇḍit: Simha King knoweth Rādhā is only a woman and Yadupati (Kṛṣṇa) is amorous.”

In the deed of gift of the village of Bispi Vidyāpati is spoken of both as महाराजपण्डित and नव जयदेव. I have found दशावधान in only one poem, of which the concluding lines are of great historical value :—

दश अवधान भन पुरुव पेम गुनि

प्रथम समागम भेला ।

आलम साह पद्दु भाविनि भजि रद्दु

कमलिनि भमर मुलला ॥

“Saith Daśāvadhān (*viz.*, one who can attend simultaneously to ten different subjects),—This first meeting is due to the memory of old love ; O beauteous one ! love Lord Ālam Shāh even as the lotus loves the bee.”

The expression Ālam Shāh, or Lord of men, must have reference to the Emperor of Delhi at the time, or the Pathān king of Bengal. कविकण्ठहार is found with as well as without Vidyāpati's name :—

भनइ विद्यापति कवि कण्ठहार ।

रस वुभ्भ शिवसिंह शिव अवतार ॥

“Saith Vidyāpati, the Necklace of poets,—S'iva Simha, the incarnation of S'iva, knoweth the taste (of this song).”

विमुखि चलल हरि वुभ्भि वेवहार ।

आवे कौ गाओत कवि कण्ठहार ॥

“Understanding this treatment Hari turned his face and went away. What will Kavi-kaṇṭhahār now sing ?”

कविशेखर invariably occurs by itself and is never coupled with the poet's name :—

कविशेखर भन अपरुव रूप देखि ।

राय नसरद साह भजलि कमलमुखि ॥

“Saith the Crown of poets,—Seeing her wondrous beauty King Nasarad Shāh fell in love with the lotus-faced one.”

नव जयदेव is found in a spirited account of a battle between Sīva Sīma and the Mahomedan army :—

रामरूपे स्वधम्म रखिअ

दान दप्पे दधीचि ख्खिअ

सुकवि नव जयदेव

भनिष्ठी रे ।

देवसिंह नरेन्द्र नन्दन

शत्रु नरवइ कुल निकन्दन

सिंह सम शिवसिंह राजा

सकल गुणक निधान षोरे ॥

“The good poet, New Jayadeva, saith,—The son King of Deva Sīma, the uprooter of the dynasties of hostile kings, the essence of all virtues, the lion-like Rāja Sīva Sīma defended and preserved his own faith like Rāma, and in charity rivalled Dadhīci.”

All these extracts are from poems not yet published.

It is impossible to state with any degree of accuracy the precise number of poems and songs composed by Vidyāpati. I have collected between six and seven hundred poems of which over three hundred have been collected in Mithilā by Paṇḍit Chunda Jha, the best authority living on Vidyāpati. Each one of these poems has been submitted to a careful test to ascertain its genuineness, and every poem of doubtful authorship has been rejected. These poems are being put together for publication. When published they will not merely establish Vidyāpati's position, which is not disputed even now, as the greatest poet of Mithilā, but also as one of the master-singers of the world, with a width of range and sweep of song worthy of a poet of the first rank. The poet lived not only to a very great age, but displayed incessant and extraordinary literary activity. He was appointed Rāj Paṇḍit in an age of Paṇḍits. In a book called *Rāg Tarāṅginī* and composed in Mithilā about two hundred years

ago, he is spoken of as पण्डितवर कविशेखर विद्यापति. Dr. Grierson does not mention that Vidyāpati, besides being the first Maithil poet, wrote a great many books in Sanskrit. Of these *Puruṣa Parīkṣā* is well known, and a Bengali translation of this work was a text-book in Bengal some time ago. Three other Sanskrit books composed by him have been printed—*Durgābhakti Taraṅginī*, *Likhanābali* and *Danbakyābali*. Among the other known books are *Śaivasarvāśwāsar Kīrti-latā*, *Kīrti Patākā* and *Gaṅgā Pattal*. He also composed some Sanskrit poems, in which the influence of Jayadeva is plainly discernible. In the village of Taraoni, or Taruban, about fourteen miles from Darbhanga, there is a large palm-leaf manuscript in Vidyāpati's own handwriting containing the whole of the *Srīmad Bhagavad-gītā*, notes and all. It is in the possession of an old lady, a widow belonging to a collateral branch of Vidyāpati's family, who refuses to part with it on any account. I have seen the book myself and there can be no question as regards its authenticity. The concluding words are:—**ल सं ३०९ श्रावण शुदि १५ कुजे रजा बनौलि पामे श्री विद्यापतेलिपिरियमिति.**

“L. S. 309, Tuesday, the 15th Śrāvaṇ, in the village of Raj Banauli. This is the writing of Śrī Vidyāpati.”

The year 309 of the Lakṣmaṇ Sen era corresponds with 1416 A.C. according to the accepted calculation. According to the Maithil calculation it corresponds with 1618 A.C. Banauli is a village about 30 miles north of Darbhanga. The character of the script is Maithil and the modern Maithil alphabet has scarcely undergone any change since the days of Vidyāpati. There is hardly any room for reasonable doubt that the Bengali alphabet, old and modern, is the same as that of Mithilā. No trace can be found of the poet's manuscripts of his numerous original writings.

There is a tradition current in Mithilā that Rāja Śiva Śimha was taken as a prisoner to Delhi. Vidyāpati accompanied him and helped in obtaining his release from the Emperor. This story would appear to be borne out by the following lines in one of Vidyāpati's poems:—

भन विद्यापति चाह्थि जे विधि
करथि से से लीला ।
राजा शिवसिंह बन्धन मोचन
तखन सुकवि जीला ॥

“Saith Vidyāpati,—Vidhātā does what he pleases. When the bonds of Rāja Śiva Śimha were removed, then the good poet lived (felt relieved).”

The dates of Vidyāpati's birth and death cannot be ascertained, but the day and month of his death are stated in the following couplet :—

विद्यापतिक अायु अवसान ।

कातिक धवज त्रयोदशि जान ॥

“ Know that the termination of Vidyāpati's life was on the white thirteenth day of Kārtik.”

This shows that the poet died on the thirteenth day of the full moon in the month of Kārtik.

